Pam H Labouret

Africa-Central

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CENTRAL AFRICA

The Problem of Communications and Transportation

Port of Pointe Noire, French Equatorial Africa.

MAR 14 1951

THE COUNTRY AND ITS RESOURCES

SINCE the close of the 19th century, Africa has assumed an unexpected strategic, political and economic importance in the world. This rise in value was further increased subsequent to World Wars I and II and to events incident to this period. The Chad Basin and its surrounding territories today represent a point of convergence for the principal aerial, maritime, fluvial, rail and road arteries, whose combined network ranges over the tropical regions, extending from America to southern Asia through Africa. The production program established several years ago in favor of underdeveloped countries, will be beneficial to these regions. Present and future essential requirements create a need to solve the difficult and complex traffic problem in this area, at a time when economic competition necessitates a general revision of cost prices, which are basically determined by distance and transportation facilities.

Central Africa is composed mainly of a huge oval depression. The formations of the system called the *Lualaba-Lubilash,* reach and overlap the contours of this depression which is sandwiched in between the end of the Carboniferous and the beginning of the Jurassic. It extends from the lower slope of the Permian, beyond the Trias and Rhaetian formations. This structure explains the presence of homologous deposits of copper, gold, diamonds and tin in the north and south of the Basin, in the Belgian Congo at one end, at the other end in Ubangi-Shari, the Middle Congo, the Cameroons and even as far as Nigeria. Fairly generalized prospecting in this area has revealed not only gold, diamonds and cassiterite, but a potential output of molybdenum, titanium, tungsten, niobium, lead, manganese, mica, graphite and lignite which have already been extracted in many instances.

From Lake Chad to the Gulf of Guinea there occurs a succession of parallel climatic conditions characterized by a constant series of atmospheric precipitations which increase toward the south. Reduced to 0.30m. per year at Fort Lamy, they reach and at times exceed 4m. at Douala, where at 14°NL begins the sub-desert vegetation of pines and mimosa, then the Sudanese savannahs covered by brush, leading to forest-clad slopes preceding the secondary light forest which is succeeded by the great primeval Equatorial forest.

On the claylike sandy plains extending from the 14th to the 7th parallel, sheep, goats and especially cattle are raised in large numbers. The latter is estimated to exceed 2 million in the territories solely under French administration. The natives also cultivate cereals and oil-yielding seeds, while the inhabitants in the extremely rainy southern zone subsist on tubers and, with the Europeans, participate in the production of palm-oil, rubber, bananas, cocoa, coffee and wood.

These lands yielding various agricultural products as well as other resources gathered from the subsoil, possess, as is quite evident, an already harmonious and balanced economy in their present stage of development.

Population: Without being densely populated as are the neighboring territories of Nigeria, there are however, compact groups in the Chad region which may be computed as follows:

Territory of the Chad	1,100,000
French Colony of the Niger	150,000
Northern and Central Cameroons under French Mandate	1,100,000
Ubangi-Shari	1,100,000
Middle Congo, western region	150,000
Total	3,600,000

This group could represent a major factor in world economy, provided the populations are assured of improved means of work and favorable returns for their products—which raises the problem of transportation.

POTENTIAL ROUTES

DESERT AND SEMI-DESERT ROADS

THE terrain north of the Chad region presents no extreme difficulties of transportation. The numerous automobile convoys which for the past thirty years have traversed the desert regions from one end of the Sahara to the other, have once again focused attention on the old caravan route which joined Kanem and Bornau to the ports of the Syrtes under the domination of the Carthaginian, Roman, Vandal, Byzantine, Arab and Turkish rulers, right up to modern times. In the past few months a Tunisian business concern tested the possibilities of this route and completed a commercial liaison by truck between Gabès and Fort Lamy in twenty days. The signal-equipped but ungraded roads used for this experiment were incapable in practice of sustaining the traffic of heavily loaded trucks. To function under normal conditions, it would be necessary to build a solid and permanent roadway bed, which would equal the cost of a rail line without the assurance of its being a profitable venture. For this reason several projects, which were proposed with the view of constructing a road or rail line from Tripoli to the Chad, were discarded several years ago.

In the east, toward the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan and Port Sudan on the Red Sea, an analogous solution seems to offer no further advantages despite the presence of the railroad servicing Khartoum and the Valley of the Nile to El Obéid.

Historic Route of Shari, Ubangi and The Congo

This route, which was the only one open to French colonization under the treaties defining for France, Great Britain and Germany, the zones of influence and the roads leading to the Chad, is of only secondary importance today. Utilizing at first the navigable reaches of the Chad tributaries, this inconvenient and costly route necessitated four load-breakage points from Fort Lamy to Bangui. The construction of a car-bearing road between these two cities has reduced these particular drawbacks, but at the end of the route the convoys still have to travel 1200 km. on the Ubangi and the Congo to Brazzaville, then 500 km. by rail before reaching the port of Pointe Noire.

For a long time the Congo and its tributaries were considered the sole practical and fairly inexpensive outlets for the products of the north to the sea, and the possibility of a natural north-south axis extended by rail was discussed in relation to this water route. The "Congo-Ocean" service destroyed this illusion by demonstrating that the zone of influence exercised by the new railroad, although extending to certain parts of the Ubangi and Sanga Valleys, did not reach the territories located north of the forest, so these territories must of necessity continue to seek elsewhere for more advantageous outlets to the sea.

Nigerian Routes

British Nigeria offers several outlets to the sea due to the combined resources of its roads, rails and the Benué River, one of the rare tropical African waterways not cut off in its lower and middle valleys by rapids or waterfalls.

Bangui, Ubangi-Shari.

Since 1893, the English have partially solved the transportation problem in this territory, by constructing a rail line (*Western Line*) oriented south-west—north-east. Completed prior to the 1st World War, this line extends 1,365 km., starting at Lagos, a deep-water harbor hollowed out in the almost continuous lagoon which skirts a part of the Gulf of Guinea, and terminating at Nguru, 700 km. from the western bank of the Chad. It carries all the mining products from the central provinces to the coast, as well as cattle, cereals and the oil-yielding produce of the northern and southern districts. However, its terminus is too far removed from the Chad Basin to permit it to play an equally important role for the French territories of the east.

Time was bound to bring about changes and improvements. Ever since 1914, the increasing requirements of the mining industry in the central region forced the English to add a loop to the Western Line in the Kaduna-Zaria-Jos triangle. Somewhat later, the discovery of an exceptionally rich coal basin, 240 km. to the north of Port Harcourt, at Enugu, extending over more than 4,000 sq. km. made necessary the construction of an *Eastern Line* joining the loop of Jos to Port Harcourt, a sizeable port of call on the lagoon, situated 60 km. inland on the Bony River and consequently sheltered from the caprices of the African bar. Since 1920 it has been accessible to the largest ships, and being perfectly equipped, it has become the rival of Lagos. The *Eastern Line,* terminating at this point, facilitates, to an appreciable degree, exports from the Chad. However, before reaching Jos, these products must be carried by truck over 745 km. of roadway, a section of which is impassable during the rainy season.

Merchandise from the Chad, from a part of Ubangi and the Northern Cameroons, not transported across the roads of Nigeria and by rail, can still be carried over the Benué waterway, whose source is on the Adamaoua Plateau and which joins the Niger at Lokoja, a spot situated 450 km. from the mouth of the river. This route, navigable during the high waters over a length of 1,400 km. between Garoua, situated 70 km. from the Nigerian border, and the small port of Burutu, summarily equipped at one time by the Royal Chartered Niger Co., has various disadvantages which will be described later in the text.

Routes in the Territory of the French Cameroons Under United Nations Trusteeship

From Fort Lamy, there are routes passable in all seasons through Maroua, Garoua and Ngaoundéré enabling transportation to Yaoundé where the Central Railroad terminates. This line joins Yaoundé to the Port of Douala, at the mouth of the Wouri on the Gulf of Guinea. Two lines join this north-south axis; one being the "Northern Railway," better called the northwest passage, since it also serves the populated fertile region bordering on the south the eastern frontier of Nigeria, and the second being the heavy trade route, linking Bangui to

Yaoundé. As a result, the Ubangi-Shari and part of the Middle Congo cease to be dependent upon inconvenient, costly and unprofitable waterways for their transportation to the sea.

Comparison of Routes: In the light of these explanations it is possible to set up a comparison chart of the routes from Fort Lamy to the various coastal ports. Note that trips on improved routes are generally interrupted for 3 or 4 months during the rainy season.

	Span	*Automobile*	*Railroad*	*Waterway*	*Distance*	*Duration*
I	Lamy, Gabès, Tunisia	Dry Season 2,500 km.			2,500 km.	1 month
II	Lamy, Abécher, El Obéid, Port Sudan	Dry Season 1,616 km.	1,506 km.		3,122 km.	2-3 months
III	Lamy, Bangui, Brazzaville, Pointe Noire	Dry Season 1,200 km.	500 km.	1,200 km.	2,900 km.	10 months
IV	Lamy, Dikwa, Nguru, Lagos	Dry Season 700 km.	1,365 km.		2,065 km.	2-3 months
V	Lamy, Maïduguri, Jos, Port Harcourt	Dry Season 745 km.	854 km.		1,599 km.	3-5 months
VI	Lamy, Garoua, Benué, Burutu	575 km.		1,400 km. July 15th Oct. 15th	1,975 km.	4-5 months
VII	Lamy, Yaoundé Douala	1,650 km.	307 km.		1,957 km.	2 months

ROADS AND MEANS OF TRANSPORTATION UNDER FRENCH MANDATE

IN the frontier zone between the Cameroons under French mandate and those under British trusteeship, there is a wide mountain barrier stretching from the sea to the 8th parallel, that is very difficult to cross except at two or three points. This obstacle on the one hand, and the heavy weight of the merchandise from the north and east on the other, tend to orient the lines of communication toward the Port of Douala rather than Nigeria. Geographic phenomena and economic needs combine to localize the territory under French trusteeship as the principal route of access and egress from the hinterlands of Equatorial Africa. In anticipation of the future, a sound program of rail and road development was proposed, but its execution has been constantly retarded, first by the general crisis of 1929-30, then by the uncertainty of the political and economic situation, as evidenced by the series of monetary devaluations, and finally by the war of 1939-1945. After peace was restored, the aforementioned projects, revised and adapted to current needs, were resumed and have been in the process of completion for the past three years.

Railroads

At present there are two railroad lines, the "Northern," which was built entirely by the Germans, and the "Central," which was begun by them and completed under the mandatory regime.

It was not until 1905 that the Imperial Administration, established in the Cameroons in 1884, engaged in a rail construction program as part of the grandiose *Mittel Afrika* plan formulated at the beginning of the century for the purpose, both political and economic, of joining by rail the eastern and western possessions of the Reich in Africa. The Northern Cameroons Line was to be one of the first links in this chain. In response to pressure from the Colonial League and the demands of the planters and businessmen, who, rightly or wrongly, based great hopes on the development of the Chad Basin, it was resolved to hasten the work in the north. Undertaken prematurely in 1906 without sufficient study or adequate surveying, and after the first 100 kilometers were completed, the span ran up against the obstacles mentioned above, those formed by the mountain chain rising 800 to 2,000 m., which bars access to the plains of Ngaoundéré and Garoua. At an altitude of 900 m. the line was terminated at Nkongsamba (160 km.). Since this line was inadequate, having been planned for a mere 7-ton load per axle and erected on a platform without ballast, its capacity was naturally weak and abnormally strained. By 1914 the final installations were not yet completed.

The "Central Line" was planned in 1908, begun in 1910 and reached only as far as Eseka (174 km.) by August 1914. This line encountered all the difficulties of the northern route; moreover, it was destroyed and damaged for long stretches in the course of the first World War. In 1927 it was repaired by the mandatory power and extended to Yaoundé (307 km.). A 38 km. branch line from Otélé to Mbalmayo was subsequently added, thus connecting the Central Line to the terminus of the navigable channel of the Nyong River. The construction plan of 1921, on which these projects were based, also provided for the extension of the Central Railroad to the Chad. Up to the present time, circumstances have prevented the completion of this program.

During the last war these two railroads carried such extremely heavy traffic that it seriously damaged the substructure and the equipment, and caused excessive wear on the already deteriorated rolling stock which was impossible to replace. When peace was declared, it became absolutely necessary to modernize this equipment in order to meet the anticipated needs, which promised to exceed by far the demands of 1938. Actually, as early as 1945, important lumber developments were reclaimed and others initiated, while, by means of improved equipment, the agricultural production of palm oil, cocoa, coffee and bananas was expanded, and research and mining ventures

Railroad Station at Ladima.

showed prospects of gratifying results for 1952. These factors culminated in a railway development project estimated as follows:

	Downgrade (in tons)	*Upgrade*	*Total*
Central Line	350,000	100,000	450,000
Northern Line	120,000	30,000	150,000
Total:	470,000	130,000	600,000

These estimates do not seem extreme if one refers to the comparative traffic of the two lines for a ten-year period including the interruption of service caused by the war.

Merchandise (in tons)	*1938*	*1948*
Central Line	138,388	183,338
Northern Line	104,078	103,792
Total:	342,466	287,130

The ten-year plan of 1946, based on the probable 600,000-ton freight traffic, will be worked out in two five-year periods, in accordance with the progressive production and equipment requirements of the territory. The following outline presents only the main features of the first five-year plan (1947-1952).

1— Conversion of the two railroad lines into heavy-track lanes, capable of carrying trainloads drawn by heavy-duty locomotives, and providing for 15 tons per axle, 30-kilogram rails and 1,500 ties per kilometer. This modification necessitates the revision, the reinforcement and sometimes the total replacement of existing equipment as well as parts of the substructure and also requires the construction of certain branch lines.

2— Electrification of the Central Line by means of a power-house supplied by the Edéa Dam (80 km. from Douala) and now under construction.

3— Junction of the Northern Line and the Central Line, originating respectively in Bonabéri and Douala, towns situated on opposite banks of the Wouri. Studies on this subject seem to favor the construction of a combination bridge and dam approximately 1,500 m. long, allowing for a railway and a highway. The realization of this project would make it possible to regroup and merge equipment and services which are now duplicated, and would both facilitate and increase the freight traffic of the railway lines and of the Port of Douala.

4— Simultaneous modernization of operating methods, haulage techniques and installations.

In order to complete this task, credits up to 1,752,500,000 francs CFA were granted for the three-year period of 1946-49. Of this amount, 1,038,500,000 francs have been expended, the balance being reserved to cover the orders for rolling stock and materials which neither the French nor foreign manufacturers could fill or deliver before the end of 1949.

To sum up, at the end of 1949, the Cameroons rail system had:

a) restored 20% of the length of its routes;

b) increased the number of locomotives by 25% and their power by 50%;

c) doubled its passenger-car capacity;

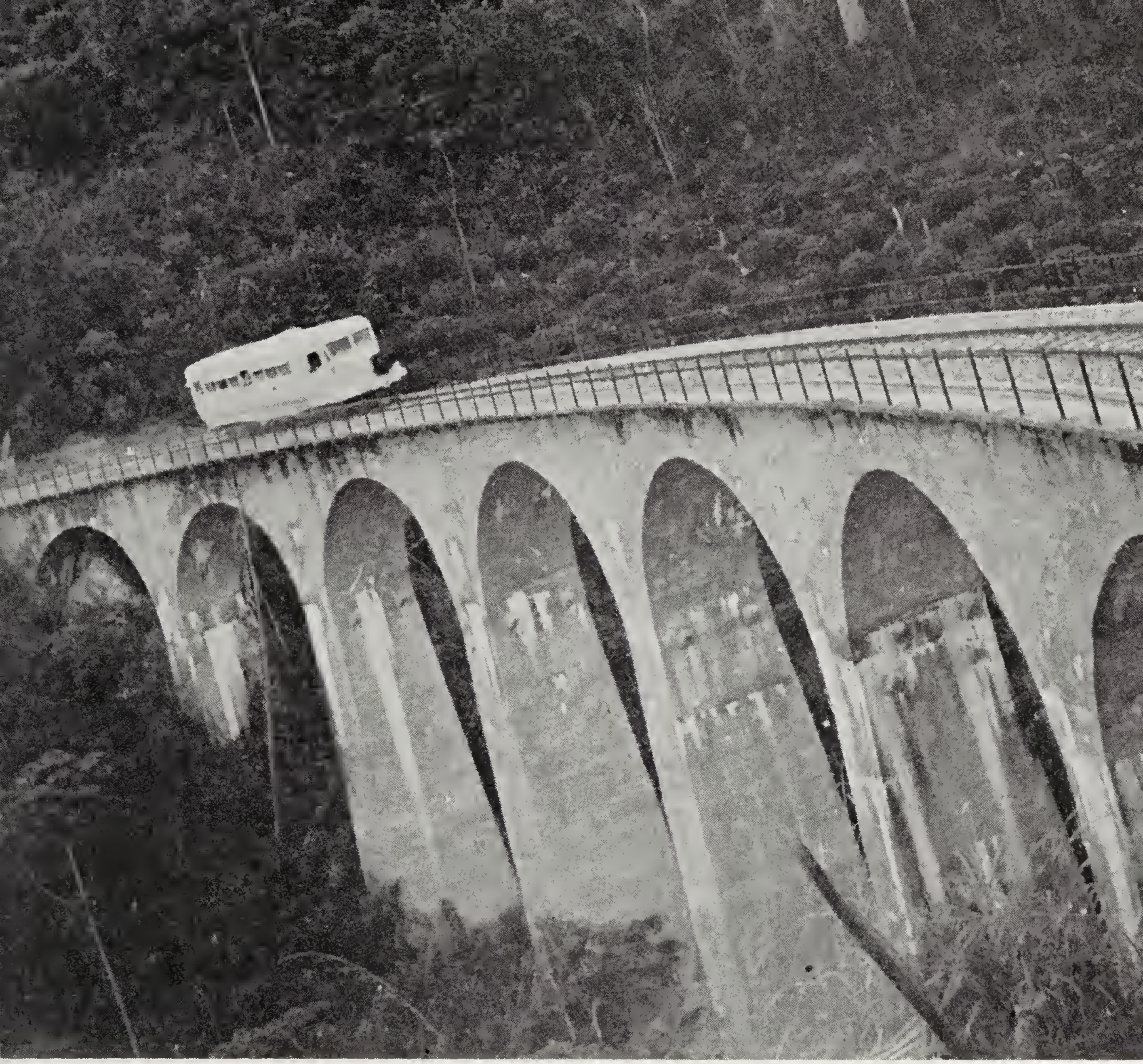
d) doubled its freight-car capacity.

Extension of the Central Railroad as far as the Chad

The project to extend the Central Railroad as far as the Chad, first formulated by the Germans, was resumed in 1921 under the Colonial Development Plan proposed by A. Sarraut. This plan met with great favor in the Cameroons, where a rapidly growing economy called for a constructive transportation policy in order to fulfill both the local needs, and those of the neighboring regions.

Since 1925, various projects were under discussion and during 1930-31, a team of technicians carried out extensive surveys to obtain the most feasible layout. Circumstances intervened during the immediate and following years to hamper the realization of the program proposed by its head, the engineer Milhau. Present conditions warrant its reconsideration and even its execution, if not in its entirety, at least in part, for the time being.

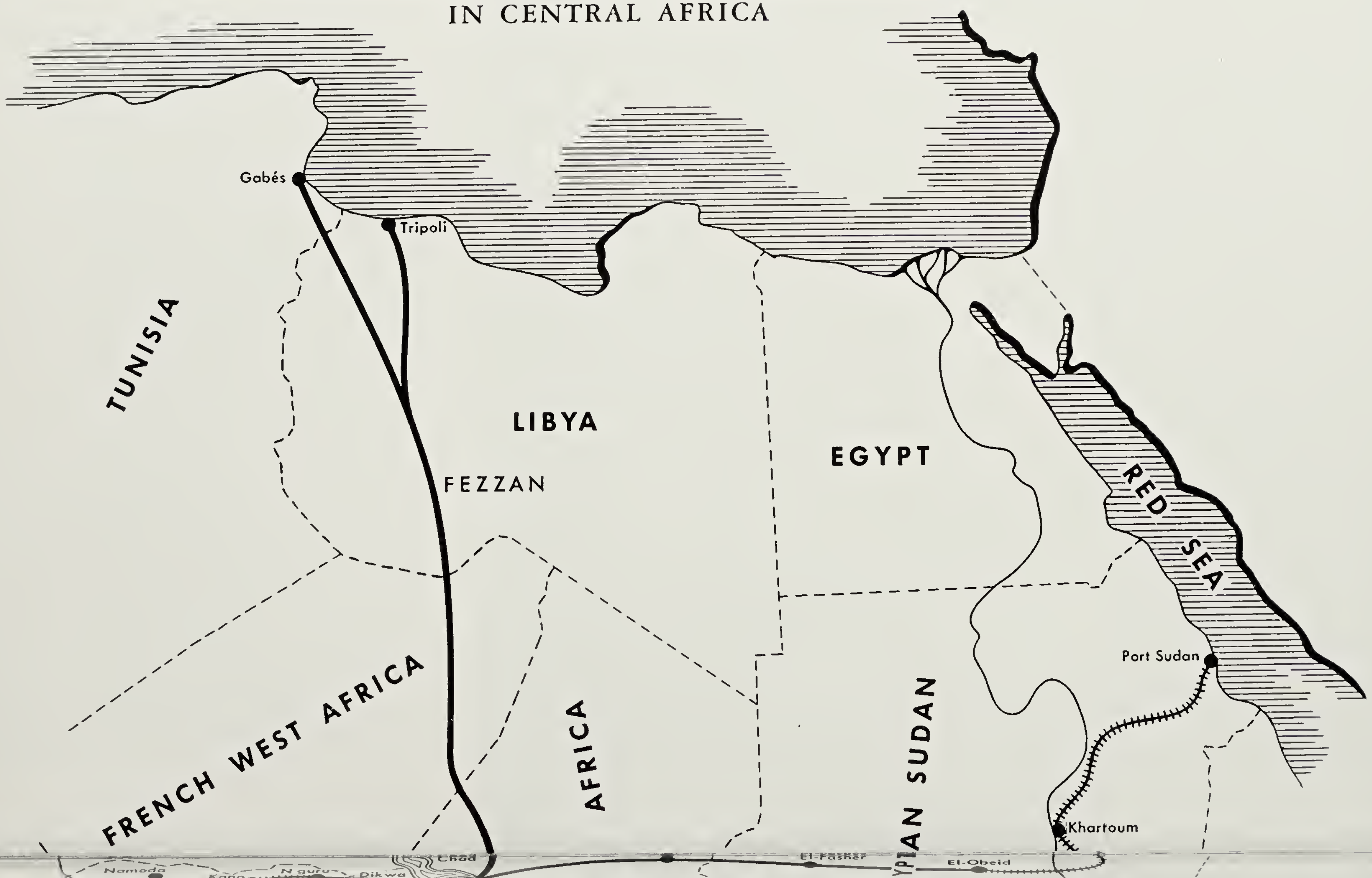
The layout chosen is logical and dictated by geographic requisites.

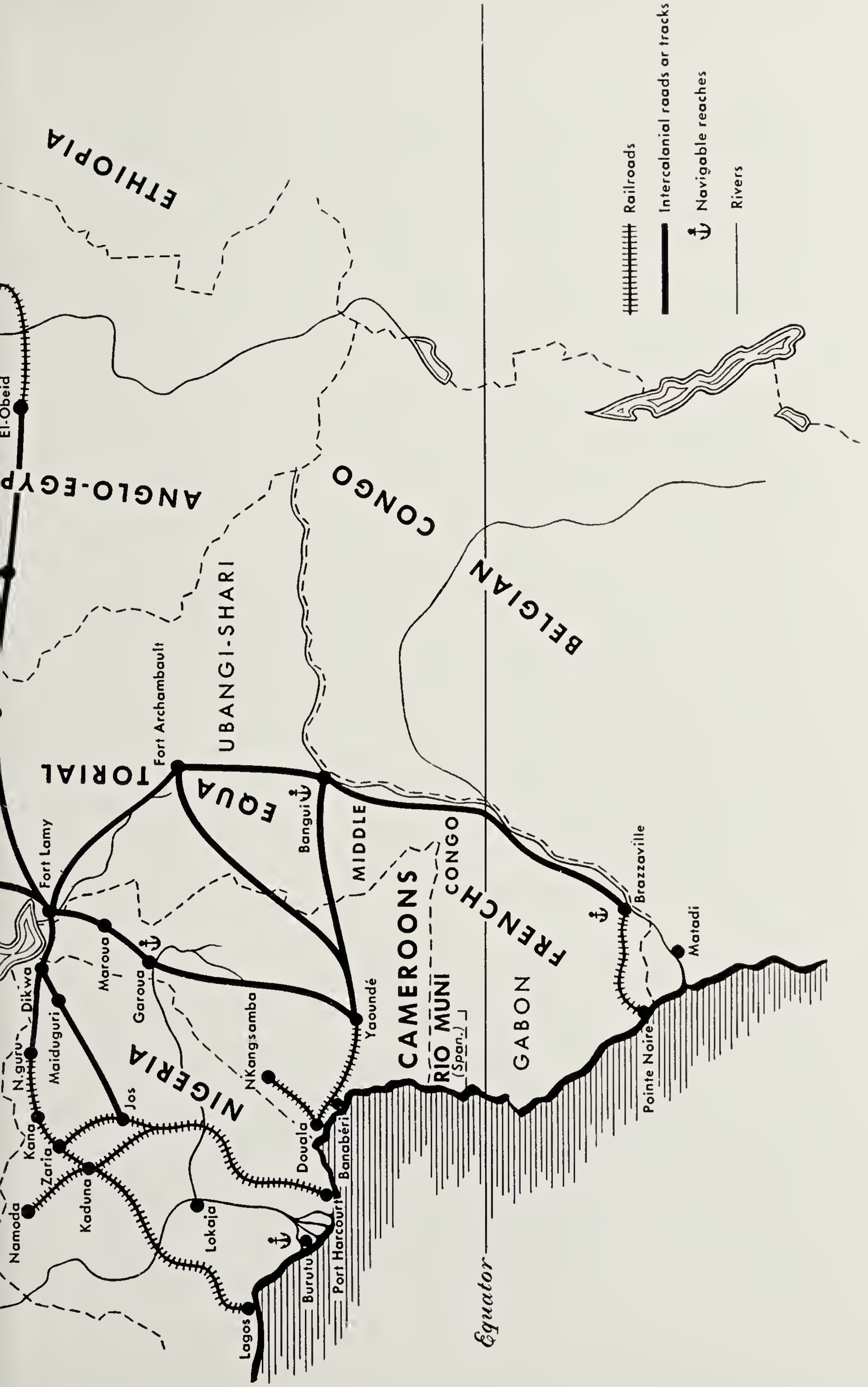


One of the Viaducts on the "Congo-Ocean" Railroad.

From Yaoundé, the railway runs north to Obala, up the left bank of the Sanaga River and through the middle valley, then follows its affluent the Lom. The line crosses without difficulty the 1,000-2,000 m. ridge which separates the Lom Basin from the Mbéré, a tributary of the Logone, runs along this river to the rocky shelf of Kaïtia, the extreme point where dock the shallow-draught lighter crafts from Fort Lamy. Then, at Baïbokoum, the route would follow the right bank of the Logone up to Moundou, finally reaching Fort Archambault in the Chad Plain, at which point it would be simple to extend it northeast to Abécher, El Facher and the Anglo-Egyptian Sudanese Railroad. Perhaps it could eventually join a branch of a trans-African line from the north or northwest in the direction of the Belgian Congo.

ROADS AND MEANS OF TRANSPORTATION IN CENTRAL AFRICA




ETHIOPIA
ANGLO-EGYP
El-Obeid
UBANGI-SHARI
Fort Archambault
EQUA
TORIAL
Bangui
MIDDLE
CONGO
BELGIAN
CONGO
FRENCH
GABON
CAMEROONS
RIO MUNI
(Span.)
Brazzaville
Matadi
Pointe Noire
Fort Lamy
Dikwa
Maroua
Garoua
Yaoundé
NKangsamba
Maiduguri
N.guru
Kano
Zaria
Kaduna
Namoda
Jos
NIGERIA
Lokaja
Douala
Banabéri
Port Harcourt
Burutu
Lagos
Equator
Railroads
Intercolonial roads or tracks
Navigable reaches
Rivers

Between Yaoundé and Baïbokoum, over approximately 1,000 km., the proposed layout is almost entirely on a level or semi-level plane within a 5% differential, and thus does not require major tunnels or viaducts, but only ordinary banking, grading and general construction work. Manpower can be recruited easily on the spot or in neighboring regions and can receive adequate supplies of meat, cereals and tubers.

The latest estimates set the construction costs of the 1,000 km. Yaoundé-Baïbokoum section at approximately 9 billion francs CFA. It is evident, however, that this line would yield increasing returns as it operates, since it would carry from the forest region of Obala to Nanga Eboko, wood, palm kernels, palm-oil and cocoa beans, and would receive from Bertoua, Batouri and Bétaré Oya, rutile, gold, diamonds and other products now shipped by road from Bangui. It would also transport supplies and miscellaneous commodities. Farther north it would load cattle, peanuts and cotton which now come down by truck from the Chad and Ubangi-Shari to Douala.

Highway System

In general, the railroads are supplemented by a highway system which supplies them over a more or less extensive area. The highway system of the Cameroons was laid out before the last war, with roads able to bear the weight of only light vehicles, those not exceeding 3½ tons maximum. At the termination of hostilities, it became necessary for the main arteries to be gradually adapted to heavy trucks of more than a 10-ton capacity.

The present system comprises 10,600 km. of highways:

5,800 km. of highways passable the year round;
3,000 km. of lighter highways practicable for automobile traffic between the main markets and administrative centers;
1,800 km. of dry-season highways.

The term highways embraces two categories of roads:

1—intercolonial connecting roads;

2—roads for local traffic, including industrial arteries, particularly numerous in the country's south and southwest regions, the richest and most highly developed areas.

The program adopted for the first 3 years of the ten-year plan aims primarily at the maintenance, expansion and reinforcement of the existing system and at the modernization and completion of the economically significant intercolonial links and arteries. This program covers 1,520 kms.

This section of the network is in the form of an inverted T, the vertical line running north-south, the horizontal line running east-west.

At present, the 4 arteries most vital to the territory's economy are the following:

1—The Douala-Edéa-Yaoundé route, paralleling the Central Rail Line and serving a well-developed region producing wood, oil-yielding products and cocoa. It extends to the east through Abong Mbang, Bertoua, Batouri to Bangui, functioning largely as an outlet for exports from the Middle Congo and even from Ubangi-Shari. Thus, it plays an interterritorial role, one that has been increasing in importance for the past three years.

2—The Douala-Bonabéri-Nkongsamba-Bafang route, running alongside the Northern Railroad and extending beyond it, is used to convey palm-oil, palm kernels, cocoa and coffee from the rich provinces inhabited by the Bamiléké and the Bamoun. It is being continued to the cassiterite deposits in the Banyo region and may soon become the "tin route." To the west of Bafang, it could be linked to Bamenda, a town in the Cameroons Territory under British trusteeship, as soon as the Nigerian network has been extended on that side.

3—The Douala-Eséka-Ebolowa-Ambam route is used for shipping wood products, cocoa and palm-oil from the Ebolowa region to the Port of Douala, as well as agricultural and mining products from Oyem in Gabun. The Moundané Bridge, now under construction over the Mungo, also enables this route to play an intercolonial role with respect not only to Equatorial Africa, but to Nigeria as well. However, the southern section of this network is diminishing in importance since the Port of Kribi, which is being considerably improved, is now accessible, by means of a well-traveled road, from Ebolowa, Ambam and Oyem.

4—The great Cameroons dorsal route starts at Yaoundé, passes through Ngaoundéré, Garoua, Maroua and finally reaches Fort Lamy, a stretch of 1,650 kms. It is used to transport the major portion of the products from the Chad, Ubangi-Shari and the western Middle Congo to Douala.

Hence, the Cameroons network indirectly serves the large centers of Fort Lamy, Fort Archambault and Bangui.

Material and Financial Difficulties

The obstacles encountered in the gradual improvement of the road system are due less to orography, than to the nature of the soil and the abundance of rain beyond the 5th parallel.

Since the southern part of the territory is made up of a thick layer of sedimentary soil providing little utilizable material, it is therefore necessary to bring from the north crystalline, eruptive or lateritic rocks suitable for erecting substructures, for surfacing and for general construction work. In this same region, all outdoor work is interrupted for more than four months of the year, the entire area having a precipitation of 2 to 4 m. during the rainy winter season.

The excessive rains cause the high waters to rise suddenly, often producing rather extensive floods, which necessitate the bridging of

A road between Brazzaville and Pointe Noire, French Equatorial Africa.

breaches much larger than those occurring in European regions. For the time being, the work outlined in the first part of the ten-year plan, consists in rerouting and rebuilding the eastern road which connects with Ubangi, the dorsal highway running north to the Chad, and the economically important highways of the south. In the interim and pending completion of this program, which is already well advanced, ferries and motor barges assure service across some of the important waterways.

The work decided upon in 1946 and soon undertaken, was slowed down considerably by the failure of French and foreign suppliers to fulfill and deliver orders within the allotted time, especially for the two materials indispensable to road construction, cement and asphalt.

The financing of this project was calculated on a rather large scale, as evidenced by the fact that the "Roads and Bridges" item of the tri-annual plan of 1946-49, amounted to 1,964,000,000 francs CFA.

Brazzaville, Ubangi cotton unloaded from Congo River barges.

PORTS

Douala

ALL communication systems entail units for receiving, distributing and shipping. Due to its unusual geographic location, the most significant port for the vast region previously indicated is unquestionably Douala. Protected by a vast sheltered roadstead, shut in by two opposing capes, this city and its twin Bonabéri are situated 12 miles in from the ocean at the far end of the Wouri estuary, where they are shielded against the direct onrush of the sea and the caprices of the bar. Thus they are afforded safeguards seldom found on the African coast. Two constantly dredged channels, one measuring 6 km. downstream and the other 2 km. upstream, render both cities accessible, in all weather, to ships drawing 6.10 m. Ships drawing more than 8.80 m. can anchor not far from there, to the south, at the mouth of the Dibamba in Manoka Bay, where installations are being made and where barge traffic is already in operation.

In 1913, the two ports of Douala-Bonabéri, still equipped in summary fashion, accounted for a freight traffic approximating 80,000 tons. The Mandatory Power improved them by building wharves and docking facilities to increase their safety, and by providing sheds and essential handling equipment. In 1946, the ten-year plan provided for indispensable enlargements and improvements. It is anticipated that in 1952, freight traffic in this area will total 600,000 tons of which 400,000 cover exports and 200,000 imports. It is quite possible that, if need be, this tonnage could be doubled within the next five years.

At present the Port of Douala is equipped with five berths for large ships and will have twelve in all as soon as the new quays have been extended by 1,050 m., whereas the piers of Bonabéri will be extended by 200 m. to facilitate banana shipments. At the same time port installations will be modernized, wharves will be enlarged and surfaced with concrete and asphalt, while new warehouses, sheds and workshops will be built. The port's railway system has already been revised and provisions made to enable the unloading of cargoes directly into freight cars without the use of pulley-blocks.

The equipment has been renovated, modernized and replaced by powerful machinery, namely: 14 automobile cranes, 20 claw-hoists, the majority of which have a hoisting capacity in excess of 5 tons, tractors, mobile gantry cranes, towboats, pilot tugs and motor launches. The equipment at Bonabéri is not included in this list.

If the expected improvements continue at the same rate as in the past three years, with the anticipated installations completed and proper equipment set up, it is likely that by careful management and with still heavier gear, the maritime traffic in Douala-Bonabéri will reach a norm of 1,200,000 tons and even exceed 1,600,000 tons.

Kribi

100 km. to the south of Douala, situated on an open shallow roadstead at the mouth of the Kienté River, the small port of Kribi was active to some degree under the Germans who used it almost exclusively for the loading of hevea seeds (para-rubber trees) and ivory tips. Exports were discontinued from 1914 to 1920, and Kribi was practically abandoned until the exploitation of lumber and of the cocoa plantations in the neighboring regions of Lolodorf, Ebolowa and Campo, was undertaken. In 1938, a normal year, 154 ships called at this port and its freight traffic was estimated at 21,000 tons. After the termination of the last war, the regional value of this port began to assert itself. To an appreciable degree, it competes in trade with Douala by drawing off the exports from the above-named regions, and especially since 1945, through its traffic with the Oyem-Ntem districts in Gabun to which Kribi is linked by a motor vehicle route.

Kribi possesses both the characteristics and disadvantages so typical of the African coast. Docking is impossible and all handling operations are effected off-shore by means of barges which are adequate for present needs. A 30,000- to 35,000-ton port freight traffic is anticipated for 1950. As an increase in export tonnage is expected in the near future, the construction of a small wooden pier in the bay has been projected to facilitate operations; this will eventually be replaced by a permanent wharf, provided wood exports reach the anticipated 100,000 tons.

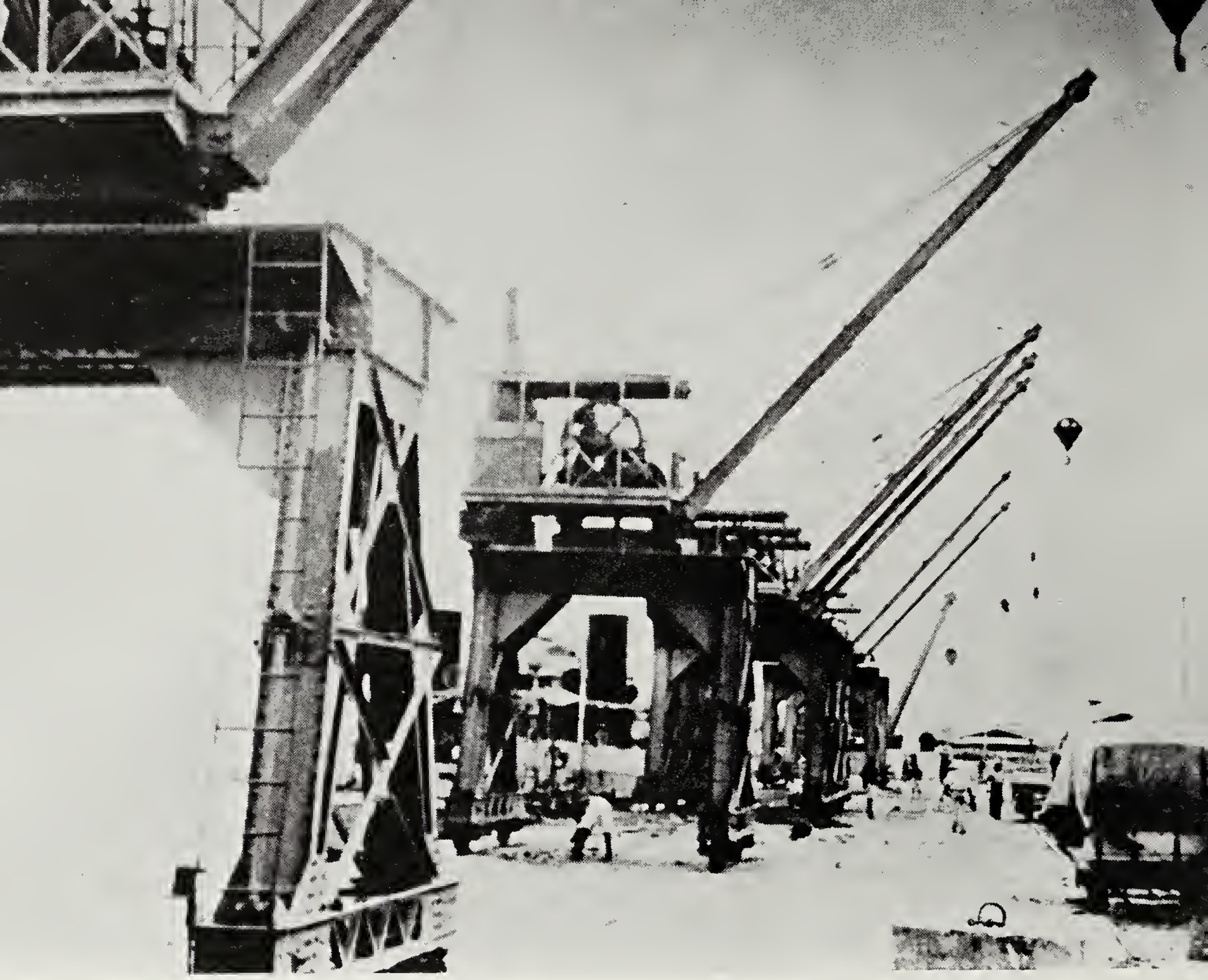
Garoua, Port on the Benué River

Garoua, on the Benué, 1,400 km. from the sea, enjoys the decided advantage of supplying a water outlet for the Chad, but has the unfortunate drawback of being accessible to navigation only about 80 days of the year, between July 15th and October 15th, for the period of high waters. During this short interval, all loading and unloading operations must be accomplished by a fleet of 20 to 30 boats based at Burutu and belonging to the United Africa Company which, to a large extent, has assumed the functions of the old and famous Chartered Company which disappeared in 1900. The small steamers handling this traffic draw 2 m. maximum, yet can haul several barges and can transport from 250 to 1,000 tons of cargo. The average time of the Burutu-Garoua trip is 15 days upstream and 10 days downstream. Since these boats operate only 3 months out of 12, in order to meet permanent overall expenses and pay the interest on the capital invested in this enterprise, their rates must of necessity be high. With no foreign competition to meet, there is scarcely any hope for an appreciable increase in the number of steamers which is insufficient even now.

The 1949 program provided for the handling of only 27,000 tons, i.e., 13,000 tons of imports including hydrocarbide, cement, sugar and miscellaneous merchandise, and 14,000 tons of exports comprising hides, peanuts, oil cake, cotton fibre, cotton-seed, and butter in tubs. Since the demand exceeded by far the freight capacity of the fleet, it was necessary, as usual, to reroute the excess either to Bangui and Brazzaville, or preferably to the Nigerian Eastern Line, Jos and Port Harcourt.

Motor-vehicle transportation presents many difficulties in these regions. At times it is interrupted by the rains, the result being that it is not always possible for the arrival of shipments to coincide with the active period of the Garoua shipping fleet. For the exporters, these conditions impose costly delays, heavy stockpiling expenses, losses and deterioration of merchandise which occur during the intervals between stoppages and the opening or reopening of water traffic.

Ever since 1946 the mandatory administration has endeavored to counteract these disadvantages by extending the period of activity and also by increasing the tempo of operations. Toward this end, two docks, one 60 m. and the other 96 m. in length, were built; the first to be used during the rise and fall of the floods, the second for the



Douala, Dock Installations.

high-waters period. Both are extended by wharves illuminated at night by electric flood lights and provided with ultra-modern equipment: hoists, tractors, tows, trolleys and set and mobile cranes. This arrangement makes possible a 24-hour work period, so that 900 tons of imports and 1,000 tons of exports, representing a freight traffic of some 150,000 tons for the 80-day active period per annum, can be handled quite adequately.

The foregoing arrangements and improvements were necessary in order to meet the demands of the Chad, where output of cotton and oilseeds is constantly increasing. These two products are expected to reach 30,000 tons in 1950 and probably 50,000 in 1955, with a relatively corresponding increase in volume for other exports, a total of 100,000 tons which the United Africa Company cannot possibly ship unless it completely changes its policy and puts additional boats in service.

A dock at Pointe-Noire.

If this inadequate service persists, a part of the tonnage will continue to be rerouted to Jos and the Eastern Line. The Nigerian Administration seems to expect this, for in the course of a conference with officials of the Cameroons under French Mandate, it considered repairing the roads joining Maïduguri to the eastern border in order to effect their junction with the neighboring network. In the event that this project is not executed, part of the products from the Chad and the North Cameroons territories would probably be transported over the large Fort Lamy-Douala axis, the remainder would be shipped down the Benué River providing the rates became more favorable.

Other Navigable Routes

In a region as rainy as Equatorial Africa, there should be possibilities for river navigation other than the Benué. However, they are less numerous than one is prone to believe, for throughout all of Africa,

Direct gift (5)

mountain chains cut across the main waterways, breaking them up into waterfalls and rapids. But there are reaches that could be rendered navigable, for example: the central Sanaga which covers approximately 400 km. could carry barges; the central Nyong, extending over 200 km. from Abong Mbang to Mbalmayon, is being considered for floating wood; and in the north, the Logone, which marks the boundaries of the eastern frontier and is accessible during part of the year as far as Kaïtia, several kilometers from Baïbokoum, could convey whaleboats and 10-ton barges.

Aside from the Benué River, we cannot rely on many future prospects for water navigation. The primary aim of this report is, above all, to summarize the main problems concerning road and rail traffic in Central Africa, the partial or total solutions reached up to the present, as well as the various projects which have been formulated regarding this question.

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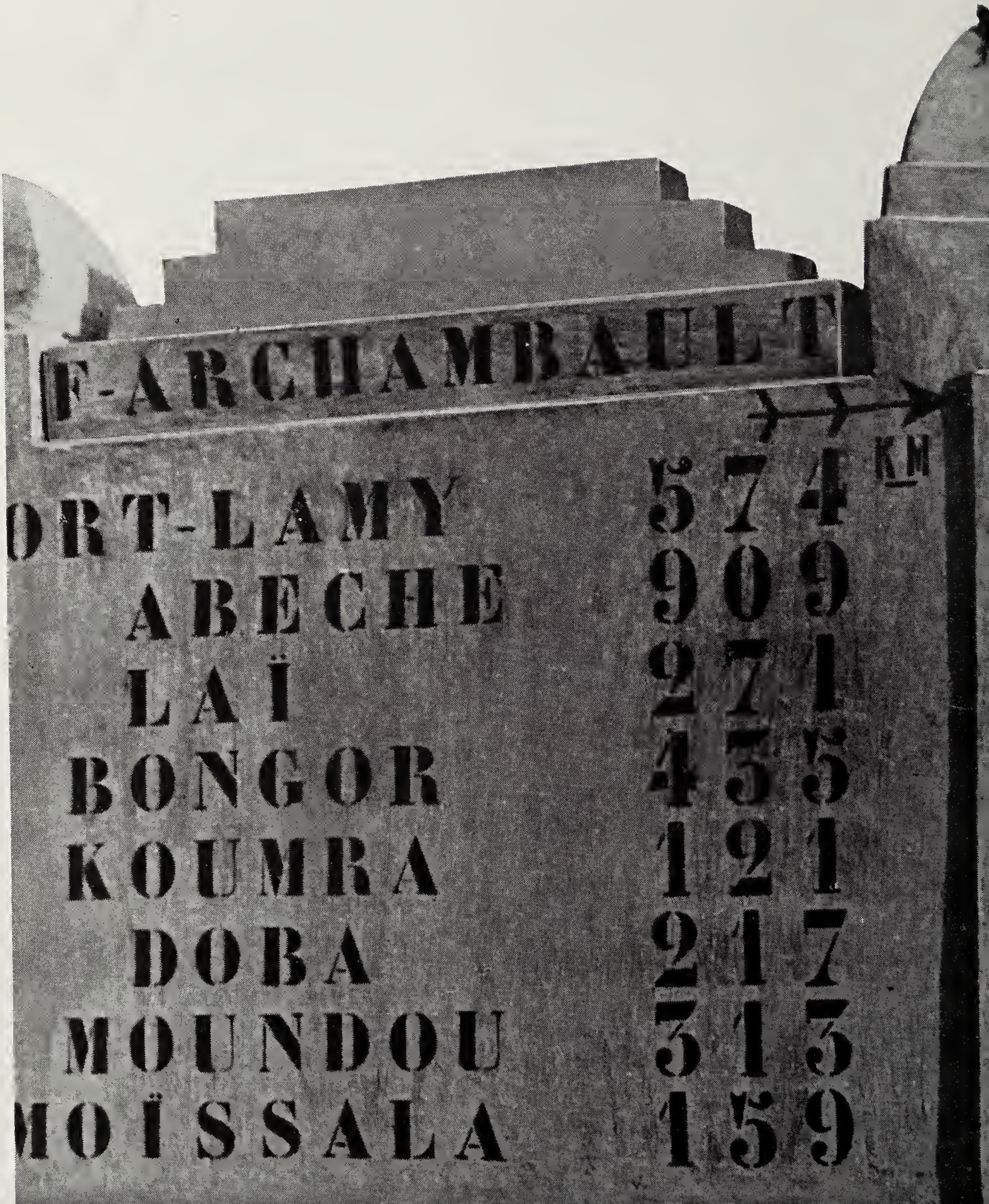
This booklet is the result of a study by M. Henri Labouret, expert on African affairs, former Professor at the Ecole Libre des Sciences Politiques and the Ecole de la France d'Outre-Mer in Paris, and author of several books on Black Africa, especially the Cameroons.

Arrival of the Congo River boat.

A bridge on the Ouaka River.



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